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U.S. PATENT APPLICATION
FOR
EMBEDDED ANTI-VIRUS SCANNER FOR A
NETWORK ADAPTER

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EMBEDDED ANTI-VIRUS SCANNER FOR A NETWORK ADAPTER

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to network adapters, and more particularly to interfacing with computers.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In computer networks, a host computer system is normally connected to the network by a network adapter. In some designs, the network adapter is a board that plugs into the backplane bus of the host computer system. In other designs, the network adapter is built into the CPU motherboard. The host computer system typically includes a device driver which operates the network adapter.

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Computer networks transfer data from one network node to another in the form of packets. For the purposes here, packets may include information for all layers of the ISO/OSI model at and above the data link layer. The network adapter transmits packets from the host computer system onto the network, and delivers packets from the network to the host computer system.

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During operation, the host computer system produces two types of host memory buffers that are consumed by the network adapter: (1) transmit buffers containing packets to be transmitted onto the network, and (2) receive buffers to hold packets received from the network. The host computer system notifies the network adapter when

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either type of host memory buffer is produced. Similarly, the network adapter notifies the host computer system when it finishes consuming either type of buffer.

For example, to transmit a packet onto the network, the host computer system produces a transmit buffer by allocating a host memory buffer from a free pool of memory buffers, and writing the packet to the host memory buffer. The host computer system then notifies the network adapter that the transmit buffer has been produced (the packet is ready for transmission). The network adapter consumes the transmit buffer by transmitting the packet onto the network. The network adapter then notifies the host computer system that the buffer has been consumed (transmission has completed).

To receive a packet from the network, the host computer system first produces a receive buffer by allocating a host memory buffer into which a packet from the network may be received. The host computer system then notifies the network adapter that the receive buffer has been produced. When the network adapter subsequently receives a packet from the network to be stored in host memory, it consumes the receive buffer by writing the packet to it. The network adapter then notifies the host that the receive buffer has been consumed (the packet has been received).

When the host computer system is notified that a host memory buffer has been consumed (either a transmit buffer or a receive buffer), it completes the processing of that host memory buffer. The host computer system completes processing a consumed transmit buffer by returning the transmit buffer to the free pool of host memory buffers. The host computer system completes processing a consumed receive memory buffer by delivering the received packet to the appropriate user process, and then returning the receive buffer to the free pool of host memory buffers.

The host computer system typically notifies the network adapter after each host memory buffer has been produced by writing a register on the network adapter. The network adapter typically notifies the host computer system after each host memory buffer has been consumed by sending an interrupt to the host processor in the host computer system.

To date, there has been no meaningful extension of the capabilities of network adapters to accomplish other tasks such as contributing to network security. Conventionally, the network adapter is often the ingress point for many untrusted files and data, which may proliferate a virus on the associated computer. Unfortunately, such ingress point fails to provide any security features to prevent an attack on the computer.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

A network adapter system and associated method are provided. The network adapter system includes a processor positioned on a network adapter coupled between a computer and a network. Such processor is configured for scanning network traffic transmitted between the computer and the network.

In one embodiment, the processor is capable of being user-configured. Further, the processor is capable of being user-configured locally and/or remotely via a network connection with the network adapter. Still yet, the processor is capable of being user-configured only after the verification of a password.

In another embodiment, the manner in which the scanning is performed is capable of being user-configured. Further, the settings of the network adapter are capable of being user-configured.

In still another embodiment, the processor is capable of determining whether received packets are of interest. Such determination as to which received packets are of interest may be based on a protocol associated with the packets.

In use, the processor is capable of passing received packets that are not of interest to the computer. Further, processor is capable of scanning received packets that are of interest. The processor is then further capable of denying received packets that fail the scan.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 illustrates a network architecture, in accordance with one embodiment.

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Figure 2 shows a representative hardware environment that may be associated with the data server computers and user computers of Figure 1, in accordance with one embodiment.

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Figure 3 illustrates an exemplary network adapter that may be coupled between a computer and a network like those shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 4 illustrates a method for scanning incoming data utilizing a network adapter.

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Figure 5 illustrates a method for configuring a network adapter scanner, in accordance with one embodiment.

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DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Figure 1 illustrates a network architecture 100, in accordance with the one embodiment. As shown, a plurality of networks 102 is provided. In the context of the present network architecture 100, the networks 102 may each take any form including, but not limited to a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN) such as the Internet, etc.

Coupled to the networks 102 are data server computers 104 which are capable of communicating over the networks 102. Also coupled to the networks 102 and the data server computers 104 is a plurality of end user computers 106. In the context of the present description, a computer may refer to any web server, desktop computer, lap-top computer, hand-held computer, printer or any other type of hardware/software.

In order to facilitate communication among the networks 102, at least one gateway 108 is coupled therebetween. It should be noted that each of the foregoing network devices as well as any other unillustrated devices may be interconnected by way of a plurality of network segments. In the context of the present description, a network segment includes any portion of any particular network capable of connecting different portions and/or components of a network.

Figure 2 shows a representative hardware environment that may be associated with the data server computers 104 and/or end user computers 106 of Figure 1, in accordance with one embodiment. Such figure illustrates a typical hardware configuration of a workstation in accordance with a preferred embodiment having a central processing unit 210, such as a microprocessor, and a number of other units interconnected via a system bus 212.

The workstation shown in Figure 2 includes a Random Access Memory (RAM) 214, Read Only Memory (ROM) 216, an I/O adapter 218 for connecting peripheral devices such as disk storage units 220 to the bus 212, a user interface adapter 222 for connecting a keyboard 224, a mouse 226, a speaker 228, a microphone 232, and/or other user interface devices such as a touch screen (not shown) to the bus 212, communication adapter 234 for connecting the workstation to a communication network 235 (e.g., a data processing network) and a display adapter 236 for connecting the bus 212 to a display device 238.

The workstation may have resident thereon an operating system such as the Microsoft Windows NT or Windows/95 Operating System (OS), the IBM OS/2 operating system, the MAC OS, or UNIX operating system. It will be appreciated that a preferred embodiment may also be implemented on platforms and operating systems other than those mentioned. A preferred embodiment may be written using JAVA, C, and/or C++ language, or other programming languages, along with an object oriented programming methodology. Object oriented programming (OOP) has become increasingly used to develop complex applications.

Figure 3 illustrates an exemplary network adapter 300 that may be coupled between a computer and a network like those shown in Figures 1 and 2. Of course, such network adapter 300 may be coupled between any computer and any network in any desired context.

It should be noted that the network adapter 300 may include any Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) card, Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) card, Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) adapter, cable modem adapter, broadband adapter, or any other type of adapter capable of being installed on any sort of housing

associated with a desktop, laptop or any other type of computer. Of course, the network adapter **300** may comprise any sort of interface between the network and the computer.

As shown in Figure 3, the network adapter **300** includes a processor **302** in communication with a standard adapter circuit **304**. The processor **302** is further coupled to the computer, while the standard adapter circuit **304** is coupled to the network. It should be noted that this configuration may vary per the desires of the user. For example, the standard adapter circuit **304** may be coupled to the computer, while the processor **302** is coupled to the network.

Such standard adapter circuit **304** may include various voltage regulating circuits, a bus, light emitting diode connections, and/or any other conventional circuitry commonly implemented in a network adapter **300**. The processor **302** of the network adapter **300** may include a single semiconductor platform or multiple interconnected semiconductor platforms with associated logic to accomplish the functionality set forth herein.

The processor **302** of the network adapter **300** may also include a packet assembler module **305** coupled to the standard adapter circuit **304** for assembling packets received from the network and packetizing information received from the computer. It should be noted that the processor **302** of the network adapter **300** is in communication with an operating system network driver **306** associated with the computer for receiving outbound data therefrom and further conditionally sending inbound data thereto, in a manner that will be set forth in greater detail during reference to Figure 4.

Also included is adapter random access memory (RAM) **308** coupled to the packet assembler module **305** for storing packets received therefrom. It should be noted

that the memory **308** may include any cache or fast memory capable of allowing quick storage and/or retrieval of data.

Still yet, the processor **302** of the network adapter **300** includes a scanner **310**.

- 5 Such scanner **310** includes anti-virus scanning capabilities. Such scanner **310** may be adapted for scanning for known types of security events in the form of malicious programs such as viruses, worms, and Trojan horses. Still yet, [0]the scanner **310** may be adapted for content scanning to enforce an organization's operational policies [i.e. detecting harassing or pornographic content, junk e-mails, misinformation (virus
- 10 hoaxes), etc.]. Of course, the scanner **310** may take any other sort of security measures.

- Optionally, various virus signature files and other related control information associated with the scanner **310** may be stored on a non-volatile solid state memory (i.e. FLASH RAM). This may be user protected by configuring the network adapter **300**
- 15 BIOS with a password that only a user can change, as will soon become apparent.

- As an option, a control module **311** may be used to control the overall operation of the network adapter **300**. It should be noted, however, that the overall operation may be controlled in any desired manner. For example, the processor **302** may be controlled
- 20 at least in part by way of the computer or a remote administrator communicating via the network.

- A user interface driver **312** is coupled to the scanner **310** for facilitating the configuration of the scanner **310** and various other aspects of the network adapter **300**.
- 25 More information on such configurability will be set forth in greater detail during reference to Figure 5.

Figure 4 illustrates a method 400 for scanning network traffic (i.e. communications, data, etc.) utilizing a network adapter. In one embodiment, the present method 400 may be used in the context of a network adapter like that mentioned hereinabove during reference the previous figure. Of course, the present techniques may be utilized in any desired context.

Initially, packets are received in operation 402 from the network. As mentioned earlier, this may be accomplished directly or through a standard adapter circuit 304, or by any other conduit. Thereafter, the packets are assembled in operation 404. This may be accomplished in any feasible method. For example, the packet assembler module 305 may utilize header information associated with the packets for assembling the data fields of the packets.

As each packet arrives, it is determined whether the packets are of interest. Note decision 406. Such determination may be based on any desired factor such as a source of the packet, a protocol associated with the packet, a timing of the packet, contents of the packet, and/or any other desired factor. In any embodiment where certain protocols are of interest, a predetermined amount of packets may need to be assembled to first identify whether the packets are of interest. Table #1 illustrates an exemplary list of protocols that may be of interest. It should be noted that such list may vary based on a security threat that files using a particular protocol pose.

Table #1

- HTTP file requests
- FTP file transfers
- Novell NetWare file transfers
- Windows Files transfers

If the packets are not of interest, as decided in decision **406**, the packets are bypassed directly to the computer. See operation **407**. This may be accomplished by bypassing the scanner **310** and RAM **308**, and communicating directly with the network driver **306** of the computer. By this design, the packets that are not to be scanned are communicated with the computer as fast as possible.

If, on the other hand, the packets are of interest, as decided in decision **406**, the packets are cached in operation **408**. For example, they may be stored in the memory **308**. This process continues until it is determined that a file or any other desired unit of data is complete in decision **410**. If the file is not complete, the process continues until enough packets of interest are received so as to complete a file.

Once a file is complete, as determined in decision **410**, it is then determined whether the file is of interest in decision **410**. For example, it may be determined that only certain files (i.e. executables, etc.) are of interest. It should be noted that such determination may not be able to be made at the packet level decision **406**. Again, if the file is not of interest, as decided in decision **412**, the packets are bypassed directly to the computer. See operation **414**. This may be again accomplished by bypassing the scanner **310** and the memory **308**, and communicating directly with the network driver **306** of the computer. By this design, files that are not to be scanned are communicated with the computer as fast as possible.

If, however, the file is of interest, a scan is performed, as set forth in operation **418**. In one embodiment, the scan is performed by the scanner **310** on the hardware processor **302** positioned on the network adapter **300**. If it is determined that the file is clean in decision **420**, the file is transferred to the computer (i.e. network driver **306**). If, however, any virus, suspicious content, malicious code, etc. is found in decision **420**,

access may be denied to the computer in operation **424**. This way, no contaminated packets and/or files reach the computer.

Further, an alert may be displayed for notifying a user of the denial of access and contaminated file/packets. As an option, such alert may also provide options as to remedies for the situation (i.e. clean, delete, quarantine, etc.). Such alert may be conveyed in any desired manner. For example, the alert may be provided to a remote administrator, using an indicator on the network adapter, and/or an interface on the computer. To accomplish this, such alert may be sent to the user interface driver **312**.

It should be noted that the foregoing process may also be applied to outgoing packets. This feature may be considered as an option that may be configured in a manner that will soon be set forth.

To this end, the scanning is accelerated through use of the hardware processor for scanning purposes. Further, by the critical positioning of the hardware processor on the network adapter, protection is inherently provided whenever network access is gained.

Figure **5** illustrates a method **500** for configuring a network adapter scanner, in accordance with one embodiment. Again, the present method **500** may be used in the context of a network adapter and associated method like that mentioned hereinabove during reference to the previous figures. Of course, the present techniques may be utilized in any desired context.

Initially, a computer user or remote administrator may be prompted for a password in operation **502**. In the case of the user of the computer being prompted, this may be accomplished utilizing the user interface driver **312** of Figure 3. On the other

hand, in the case of the remote administrator, the password request may be prompted using TCP/IP or any other desired network protocol. In the case of TCP/IP, the network adapter 300 may be assigned a dedicated IP address or MAC address for identification purposes.

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If the password is received and verified, it is then determined whether the user or remote administrator wishes to update the virus signatures associated with the scanner 310 of the processor 302 (note decision 508) or configure the network adapter settings (note decision 512).

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If an update is to be performed per decision 508, the virus signatures on the network adapter 300 may be updated in operation 510. It should be noted that the software administering the update may be positioned off the network adapter 300 on the computer or at a remote administrator site.

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If the configuration settings are to be changed per decision 512, a user may alter various network adapter 300 settings in operation 514. These settings may range from conventional settings to determining which packets and files are of interest in the context of the method 400 of Figure 4. Just by way of example, the user may configure the packet filtering to enable/disable packet assembling and scanning of HTTP file requests. Further, various other heuristics, well known virus scan settings, or the like may also be configured.

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As an option, since the memory 308 may have a limited amount of capacity with which to store assembled files, the user may be able to set a threshold for the maximum size of file to be stored in memory, or possibly prioritize the scanning of files (i.e. executables-first, JPEG's-second, etc.) As a further option, direct memory access may be used to utilize desktop RAM.

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While various embodiments have been described above, it should be understood that they have been presented by way of example only, and not limitation. For example, any of the network elements may employ any of the desired functionality set forth hereinabove. Thus, the breadth and scope of a preferred embodiment should not be limited by any of the above-described exemplary embodiments, but should be defined only in accordance with the following claims and their equivalents.

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